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A book to throw at CIA

AS Bob Woodward tells it in his new book about the Central Intelligence Agency, William Casey was consumed by a desire to "win one" for the United States when he became director of CIA early in the Gipp, err... Reagan administration.

His preferred weapon was "covert action" — secret operations designed to influence political and military events around the world for the benefit of the United States. Mr. Casey was not deterred by moral qualms about intervening in the affairs of other countries. The long string of operations that ultimately damaged U. S. interests did not give him second thoughts.

His determination, as one intelligence official put it, "to restructure the universe with an unhobbled CIA" helped get us entangled in the war in Nicaragua, an involvement Congress opposed for the most part and the public wanted no part of.

Mr. Casey, according to Mr. Woodward, went completely "off the books" when he plotted with Saudi Arabia to carry out a "pre-emptive strike" against a terrorist thought to have taken part in the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut. The terrorist was unhurt by the attack. But 80 bystanders were killed and many injured.

The book's accuracy has been challenged by the administration and by Mr. Casey's widow, but Mr. Woodward's stature as a reporter lends it credibility. In combination with disclosures from the Iran/contras hearings, it is forcing the CIA to

rethink its mode of operation. Last week, Deputy Director Robert Gates reported that new procedures would stop any future director from launching "off-the-books" operations on his own initiative. Covert actions are supposed to be more carefully evaluated.

That's reassuring up to a point. But the CIA was supposedly "reformed" just a decade ago and has already veered out of control again. And covert actions will continue to appeal to presidents frustrated by congressional and bureaucratic restraints and eager for a quick fix for vexing foreign policy problems. Congress needs to

consider measures — a CIA charter, for instance — to make sure accountability and restraint are more than empty promises.

This does not mean there should never be undercover operations. At times they may be the only way to achieve a vital objective in support of policies arrived at through open debate. What they should not be is a means for a few officials to try to

reorder the world as they see fit.

Mr. Woodward's role in telling the story is also controversial, and rightly so. The author is an editor and reporter for *The Washington Post*, yet he saved some "scoops," such as Mr. Casey's "deathbed nod," for his book. This decision conflicts with the reporter's function to report important news to the public in timely fashion.

However revealed, Mr. Casey's legacy must loom large in the revived debate over the intelligence agencies and their proper function.



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Casey: Out of control?

The New York Times _____
 The Washington Times _____
 The Wall Street Journal _____
 The Christian Science Monitor _____
 New York Daily News _____
 USA Today _____
 The Chicago Tribune _____
Louisville Courier-Journal (KY)
 Date *5 Oct. '87*